

CRS Says Tobacco Smoke Kills Nonsmokers But Overall Report is Flawed and Misleading

Although a report issued yesterday by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) concluded that secondhand tobacco smoke causes lung cancer and lung cancer deaths in nonsmokers, it is nevertheless flawed and misleading, says Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), a national antismoking organization.

ASH Executive Director John Banzhaf, who has testified as an expert on the dangers of secondhand tobacco smoke, suggests that the following are only a few of the problems with this new report.

One is that the report appears to be written by two persons who are not experts in the field and have not published any papers on the topic in recognized scientific journals. For them to be critical of prior reports by the EPA, NIOSH, OSHA, IARC, WHO, NCI, and many other governmental bodies which included contributions from such experts undercuts the weight of the new report.

Second, although the CRS report suggests that there remains major controversy among scientists, it cites primarily positions taken by tobacco industry scientists or laymen in the popular press, and not published in scientific journals and subject to peer review. It also fails to note that those same arguments were weighed and rejected by the many scientists - both governmental and independent - who helped prepare the much more comprehensive reports by the EPA, OSHA, and MOSH, to take only three examples.

Third, the suggestion that there may be a threshold level below which the many known carcinogens in secondhand tobacco smoke do not cause lung cancer in nonsmokers is entirely without any scientific support, says Banzhaf. Even if smoke contained only "promoters" rather than "initiators," there are other initiators present which would totally undermine the "threshold" assumption.

The CRS report also seemingly ignores many other analyses of the same data which have been published in scientific journals, and the predictive value of many studies considered together, he said.


The report also implies that so long as there is some doubt left as to the number of deaths from secondhand tobacco smoke, a known human carcinogen should go unregulated. This is contrary to accepted regulatory philosophy that persons should be not be involuntarily exposed to chemicals believed to cause thousands of deaths each year, even if the certainty is only 90%.

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